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ABSTRACT

The Yahi Indians were part of a larger tribal group called the Yana. The Yahi way of life, along with the lives of many other California Indian groups, changed when European and U.S. settlers came to California. In 1872 Ishi and his family were the last of the Yahi living in the Deer Creek (California) area. By 1911 Ishi was the last surviving member of the Yahi tribe. This learning kit tells the story of Ishi's life and experiences with an unfamiliar culture beginning with his arrival in Oroville, California, in 1911. The kit is colorfully illustrated with photographs of Ishi and the artifacts he made while living at the University of California Museum of Anthropology (San Francisco, California) at the request of anthropologist, T. T. Waterman,. It contains 10 review questions (and answers) about the material on Ishi and three writing activities for students to complete. The kit has a list of vocabulary words. (BT)

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ISHI: A YAHI INDIAN

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Vocabulary words

anthropology

the study of human cultures—past and present

anthropologist

a scientist who studies anthropology

archery

using bows and arrows for hunting

artifact

cultural materials or objects, crafted by a human, of archaeological or historical interest

culture

the sum of the language, customs, beliefs, and art considered characteristic of a particular group of people

custom

a belief or tradition that is passed down from one generation to the next

demonstrate

to describe, explain, or show by examples

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dialect

a regional or social variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary

interpreter

someone who translates one language into another

linguist

a person who speaks several languages fluently, a person who studies many languages and speech

mourning

to express grief or sorrow, to feel sadness from a persons death

obsidian

black hard volcanic glass that displays shiny, curved surfaces when fractured and is formed by rapid cooling of lava

phonograph

a machine that reproduces sound by means of a needle in contact with a grooved rotating disk or cylinder

preserve

to keep alive, to continue a tradition

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territory

an area of land, a region

translate

to change from one language into another, to change from a foreign language into one's own language

tribe

a group of people with common social or cultural characteristics living near each other

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Ishi, a Yahi Indian

VIEW UP DEER CREEK, YAHI TERRITORY, 1909.

Ishi was a Yahi Indian born about 1860. The Yahi Indians were part of a larger tribal group called the Yana. The Yahi way of life, along with the lives of many other California Indian groups, changed when European and American settlers came to California. Ranchers and farmers took over much of the land that the Yahi lived on. The Yahi and other California Indians could no longer hunt, fish or gather acorns as they had before the European and American settlers came. California Indians also came into contact with new diseases from the European and American settlers. In 1872 Ishi and his family were the last of the Yahi living in the Deer Creek area. By 1911, Ishi was the last surviving member of the Yahi Indians.

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Ishi comes to Oroville

ISHI IN OROVILLE, 1911.

Alone and hungry, Ishi walked into the town of Oroville in the Northern part of California in 1911. His hair was very short because he had burned it off in **mourning** for his dead relatives. This was a Yahi **custom**. When a townsman discovered Ishi both men were equally frightened by one another. The townsman called the sheriff. The sheriff did not know what to do with Ishi, and put him in a jail cell. The only food Ishi was carrying was a few manzanita berries and a bit of deer meat. The sheriff gave him a meal of beans, bread and butter and doughnuts.

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Ishi arrives in San Francisco

ISHI (RIGHT) WITH ALFRED KROEBER (CENTER) AND SAM BATWI (LEFT) IN 1911.

Ishi had no way of communicating with the townspeople because he only spoke the language of his Yahi **culture**. Soon, the **anthropologist** T. T. Waterman arrived in Oroville with a list of Yana words. Ishi understood some of the words and was delighted to hear something familiar! One of the oldest Indians of the Northern Yana tribe came to be an **interpreter** for Ishi. His name was Sam Batwi. Although the two men spoke different Yana **dialects**, Sam Batwi was able to understand and **translate** many of Ishi's words. T.T. Waterman brought Ishi to the University of California Museum of **Anthropology** in San Francisco, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Ishi never told anyone his real name because it was against Yahi **custom**. The **anthropologist** Alfred Kroeber decided to name him "Ishi," which means "man" in Yana.

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Life in San Francisco

ISHI AT THE ORPHEUM THEATER, SAN FRANCISCO, 1911.

Life in San Francisco was very different from anything Ishi had ever imagined. In Deer Creek, Ishi never saw more than 30 or 40 people at one time; that's about the number of children in a school classroom! In San Francisco, Ishi was more surprised by the large crowd of people at the beach than he was by seeing the ocean for the first time. When Ishi went to his first musical play in a theater in San Francisco, he was so amazed by the size of the audience that he watched the audience more than the play.

Not only did Ishi have to get used to large crowds, he also had to learn about things like electricity, running water, telephones, automobiles, trains, cameras and gas stoves. Even door knobs were strange and new to Ishi!

Ishi tried many new foods for the first time. He liked candy, ice cream and cake. Ishi learned to buy food from a neighborhood grocery store. He bought bread, jelly, tea, coffee, sugar, meat, sardines, potatoes, beans, rice, honey, and fruit.

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Ishi at the Museum

Ishi worked at the museum as a janitor while he lived there, because he wanted to keep busy and do his share of work. When Ishi was not working he spent a great deal of time making **artifacts**, especially on Sundays when the public came to see him. He demonstrated bow and arrow making, **archery**, fire making and other Yahi skills to visitors. Ishi made many Yahi things with new materials that he discovered in San Francisco, like glue, paint and cotton string. He also used tools he had never seen before he came to the museum, like jack-knives and metal files.

ISHI DEMONSTRATING ARCHERY TO MUSEUM VISITORS, 1914.

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Ishi at the Museum

ISHI BESIDE THE YANA HOUSE THAT HE BUILT AT THE MUSEUM, 1912.

Ishi showed the **anthropologists** and the public how to make stone tools. In his homeland Ishi often made arrow points out of **obsidian**, a natural volcanic glass that was traded between different groups of California Indians. After the coming of the European and American settlers, the obsidian trade stopped. The Yahi began using bottle glass, which they picked up from the settlers' camps and trash dumps, to make their arrow points. He liked to make arrow points for his friends and museum visitors out of window glass, orange and blue bottle glass and obsidian.

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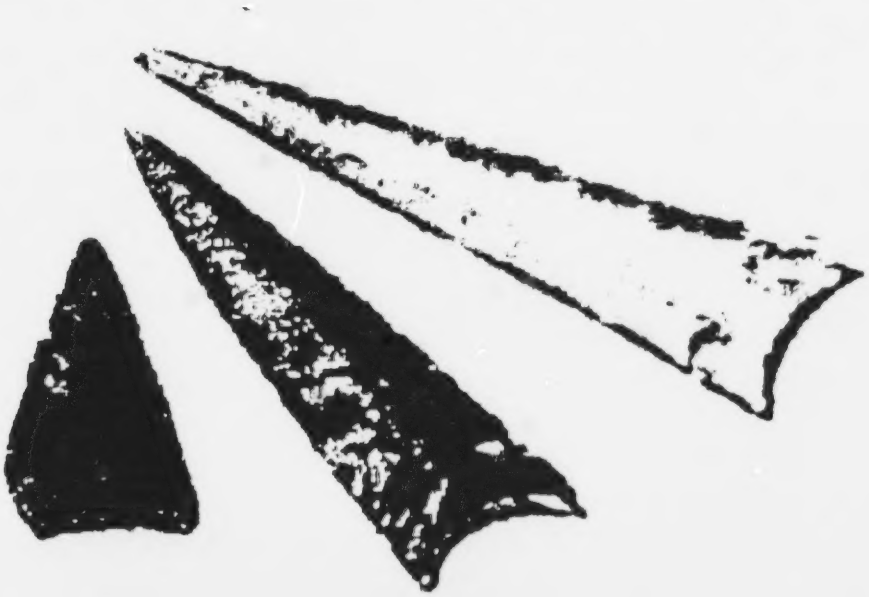
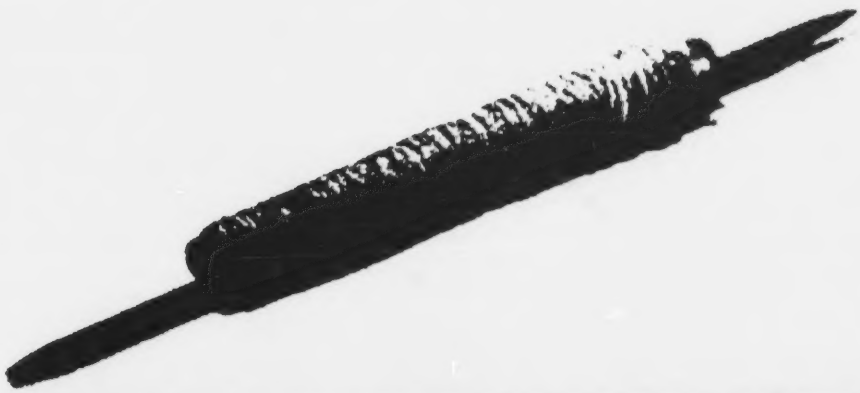
Artifacts ishi made at the museum



ARROW POINTS: BLUE BOTTLE GLASS, BROWN BOTTLE GLASS AND WINDOW GLASS. (LARGER THAN ACTUAL SIZE)



ARROW POINT FLAKER

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OBSIDIAN (VOLCANIC GLASS) BEFORE BEING CARVED

OBSIDIAN FRAGMENTS

COMPLETED OBSIDIAN ARROW POINTS. (LARGER THAN ACTUAL SIZE)

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MAKING AN ARROWPOINT BY HAMMERING ON A PIECE OF OBSIDIAN TO REMOVE FLAKES.

PRESSURE FLAKING AND ARROWPOINT (CLOSE-UP OF HAND POSITION).

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FISH HOOK, MADE FROM BONE, WOOD & TWINE

FIRE DRILL AND HEARTH

FISHING NET, MADE FROM COTTON STRING

GAME STICKS AND COUNTERS

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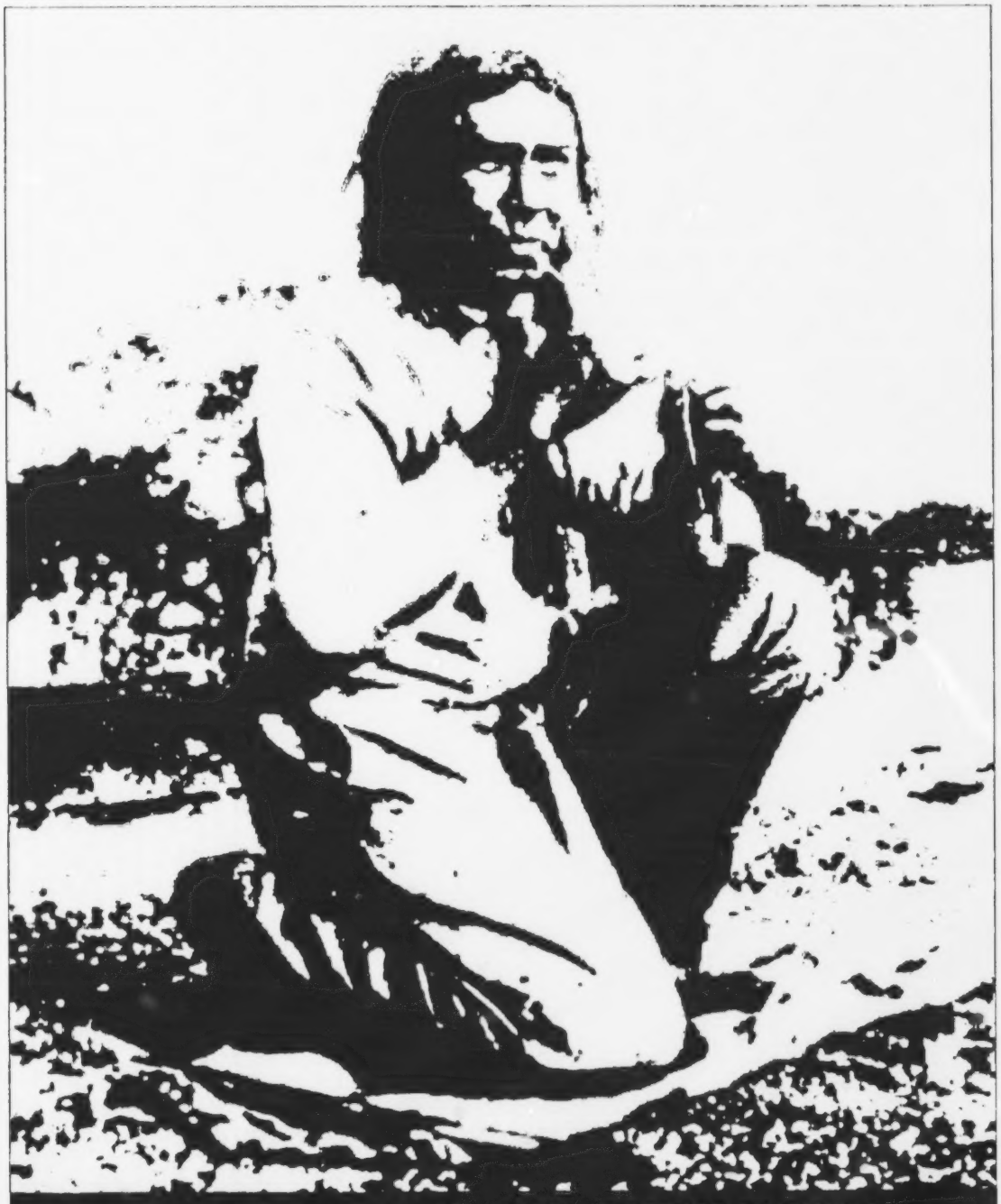

ISHI CHEWING SINEW TO SOFTEN IT BEFORE BINDING IT ONTO AN ARROW. SAN FRANCISCO, SEPTEMBER 1913.

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ISHI DRILLING FIRE

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Ishi visits his Homeland

ISHI, VISITING HIS HOMELAND, DEER CREEK, 1914.

Ishi was often photographed at the museum. This was another modern invention that Ishi had to get used to. After Ishi first saw a photograph of himself he was so surprised! He stared at it with a look of wonder and then pointed at himself, smiling.

Ishi took a trip back to his homeland with the **anthropologists** at the museum. They wanted to see where Ishi once lived. They also wanted to photograph Ishi demonstrating Yahi skills using tools Ishi made at the museum. Ishi showed the **anthropologists** how to make and use a salmon harpoon, how to make and use arrows and bows and how to hunt and skin deer.

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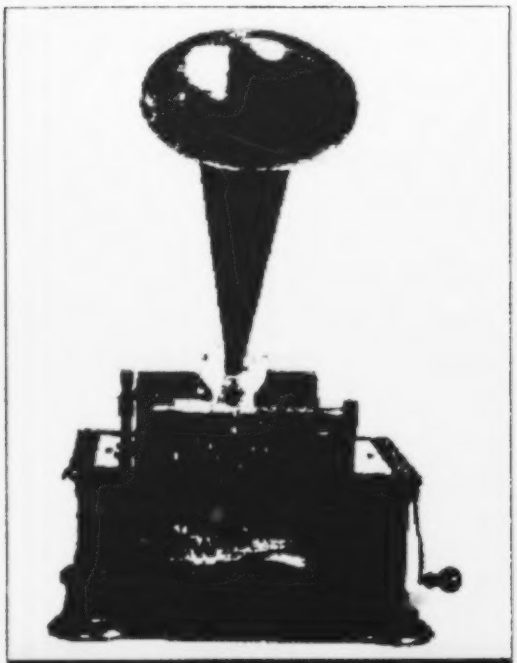
Ishi's Sound recordings



PHONOGRAPH

Thomas Edison invented a machine that could record sound around 1877. Thomas Edison called his invention a talking machine or "sound writer." He invented the **phonograph**. This machine could record sounds and play them back.

Ishi told many stories to the **anthropologists** that were recorded using the **phonograph**. One afternoon Ishi began telling the story of Wood Duck. He continued telling the story for six hours! Storytelling was an important part of the culture for California Indians. Stories often began in the evening and were told far into the night.

It was very difficult for Ishi to communicate with those around him. The **anthropologists** at the museum did not understand very much of the Yahi language, and Ishi did not speak very much English. In 1915, Ishi worked with a **linguist** named Edward Sapir who understood some Yahi. Ishi told him stories about things that happened in daily Yahi life. One story he told to Sapir was called "Tale of Lizard". In the story Ishi describes how Lizard makes arrows.

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AN EXCERPT FROM ISHI'S TALE OF LIZARD

He took up his arrowmaking things.

He rubbed the arrows smooth.

He socketed the foreshafts into the main shafts, all day.

That's what he did.

Now he painted on bands, all day.

He put them down, finished.

Now he feathered arrows.

Now worked at the feathering of arrows.

That's what he did.

He trimmed off the vanes with obsidian.

That's what he did.

He charred the feathers black.

That's what he did.

He put them away.

Below is an example of some of the words Saphir translated from Yahi to English from this tale.

Djé`duwo¯' k? iri'maun<a>
Take up | his | arrow making

dé^duk!au'
finish

mét'djari'andi'
feathered arrows

wó^djaduk!am'
put away

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ISHI SWIMMING; DEER CREEK, 1914.

At other times Ishi was recorded singing songs. Many of the songs that Ishi sang were about animals. In California Indian culture, almost every animal has its own special song. There are songs for the coyote, grasshopper, earthworm, and vulture. Ishi also sang songs about curing the sick, hunting, and dancing.

Singing songs and telling stories were the most important ways for California Indians to pass information from one generation to the next becasue they had no written language or books.

While Ishi lived at the museum in San Francisco he helped to **preserve** the language, songs, stories and skills of his people so that others could remember the Yahi way of life. Ishi died in 1916. In his coffin the **anthropologists** placed his bow, a quiver full of arrows, some dried deer meat, a basket of acorn meal and his fire sticks.

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Review Questions

1. Ishi was a California Indian. What tribal group was Ishi a part of?

2. The lives of the Yahi and other California Indian groups changed when European and American settlers came to California. How did their lives change?

3. When Ishi was found in Oroville his hair was very short. Why was Ishi wearing his hair so short?

4. Ishi never told the anthropologists his real name, why? What does the name Ishi mean in Yana?

5. Life in San Francisco was very different from anything Ishi ever imagined. List three things that were new to Ishi when he came to live in San Francisco.

6. Ishi spent a great deal of time making artifacts at the museum. List three artifacts Ishi made at the museum.

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7. Ishi demonstrated many Yahi skills to visitors that came to the Musuem. List three types of skills Ishi demonstrated to visitors and the anthropologists at the museum.

8. Ishi told many stories to the anthropologists at the museum. He also sang many songs that the anthropologists recorded. What types of songs did Ishi sing?

9. What was the name of the instrument used to record Ishi telling stories at the museum?

10. It was very difficult for Ishi to communicate with those around him. Why was it difficult for Ishi?

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Review Questions and answers

1. Ishi was a California Indian. What tribal group was Ishi a part of?

   Yana, Yahi

2. The lives of the Yahi and other California Indian groups changed when European and American settlers came to California. How did their lives change?

   Ranchers and farmers took over much of the land that the Yahi lived on. The Yahi and other California Indians could no longer hunt, fish or gather acorns as they had before the European and American settlers came. California Indians also came into contact with new diseases from the European and American settlers.

3. When Ishi was found in Oroville his hair was very short. Why was Ishi wearing his hair so short?

   His hair was very short because he had burned it off in mourning for his dead relatives. This was a Yahi custom.

4. Ishi never told the anthropologists his real name, why? What does the name Ishi mean in Yana?

   Ishi never told anyone his real name because it was against Yahi custom. The anthropologist, Alfred Kroeber decided to name him "Ishi" which means "man" in Yana.

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5. Life in San Francisco was very different from anything Ishi ever imagined. List three things that were new to Ishi when he came to live in San Francisco.

large crowds, electricity, running water, telephones, automobiles, trains, cameras, gas stoves, door knobs and many types of food

6. Ishi spent a great deal of time making artifacts at the museum. List three artifacts Ishi made at the museum.

arrowpoints, bows, arrows, fishing nets, game sticks and counters fire drill and hearth, fishing hooks

7. Ishi demonstrated many Yahi skills to visitors that came to the Musuem. List three types of skills Ishi demonstrated to visitors and the anthropologists at the museum.

He demonstrated bow and arrow making, archery, fire making and how to make stone tools.

8. Ishi told many stories to the anthropologists at the museum. He also sang many songs that the anthropologists recorded. What types of songs did Ishi sing?

Many of the songs that Ishi sang were about animals. In California Indian culture, almost every animal has its own special song. There are songs for the coyote, grasshopper, earthworm, and vulture. Ishi also sang songs about curing the sick, hunting and dancing.

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9. What was the name of the instrument used to record Ishi telling stories at the museum?

phonograph

10. It was very difficult for Ishi to communicate with those around him. Why was it difficult for Ishi?

The anthropologists at the museum did not understand very much of the Yahi language, and Ishi did not speak very much English.

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Writing Activities

1. Pretend that you are Ishi. Write a short story in which you describe seeing the city of San Francisco in1911 for the first time. Describe how you feel about seeing large crowds of people, the ocean, tall buildings, automobiles, telephones, grocery stores and running water. Remember even door knobs were strange and new to Ishi!

2. Try to imagine the difficulty Ishi had communicating with those around him. The anthropologists at the museum did not understand much Yahi, and Ishi never learned much English. Describe how this might have made Ishi feel and describe other ways he might have tried to communicate with those around him.

3. While Ishi lived at the museum in San Francisco he helped to **preserve** the language, songs, stories and crafts of his people so that others could remember the Yahi way of life. If you were asked to describe your own culture, what would you tell the anthropologists? What would you want others to know about your way of life?

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